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# Views of female preschool pre-service teachers about male teaching colleagues

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## Abstract

In Turkey in the preschool sector there are fewer male teachers than female teachers. The views of female colleagues are one factor that affects the entry of males to this sector. This study investigated female preschool pre-service teachers' views about male teachers. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews and content analysis was used to reveal the concepts and relations that explain the data. According to the findings, three main themes were determined: the presence of male preschool teachers in the profession, factors affecting male teachers' choice of occupation and ways of decreasing society's bias concerning male preschool teachers.

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**Keywords:** *Male preschool teachers; pre-service preschool teachers, preschool education*

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## 1. Introduction

Today, both men and women can be seen in non-traditional occupations. For example; there are female soldiers, truck and bus drivers while men are nurses and work in the child care sector. Although there is an increase in the number of men in early childhood education, preschool teaching is still accepted as women's work by societies thus, the majority of preschool teachers are female (Cameron, 2001; Sandberg & Pramling-Samuelsson; 2005; Sumsion, 2005). According to various sources, in Turkey 7% of preschool teachers are male (Ministry of National Education Statistics, 2011), 6% in Sweden (Sandberg & Pramling-Samuelsson; 2005), 3% in the USA (The Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2010), and less than 1% in New Zealand (Jones, 2009). In Europe, at 9% Norway has the highest rate of male preschool teachers (Peeters, 2007).

Research about male preschool teachers has attracted much attention recently with the increase in the population of male preschool teachers in Turkey (Ministry of National Education, 2000; 2011). The literature review show that researches focuses on male pre-service (Anliak & Beyazkürk-Şahin, 2008; Beyazkürk, 2006; Fu & Li, 2010; Inan, Bayındır, Doğan-Temur & Bartan, 2010; Sakellariou & Rentzou, 2007; Sumsion, 2000b;) in-service teachers (Fagot, 1977; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009; Rodriguez, 1997; Shaham, 1991; Sumsion, 1999), female preschool teachers (Barnard, 2000; Clyde, 1994), comparison of male and female teachers (Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003), teacher-directors (Sumsion, 2000a), and preschool children who have male teachers (Riley, Holmes, Convell & Blume,

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1985). While some only review the literature (Farguhar, 1997; Jones, 2009; Peeters, 2007; Seifert, 1986), other studies contain more comprehensive samples such as pre-service teachers, classroom teachers, and male professors (Cooney & Bittner, 2001). However, a few researchers focus on the views of female pre-service preschool teachers concerning male teachers in the preschool sector.

In relation to female teachers, Cooney and Bittner (2001) stated that when male preschool teachers talked to their female colleagues about classroom issues, they felt isolated and uncomfortable. Sak (2005) studied 106 male beginning teachers and reported that male preschool teachers felt that they had received negative attitudes from female colleagues and the school administration. It appears that this situation causes the male teachers to leave preschool teaching and plan to change careers; to become administrators, transfer to Girls' Vocational Schools as a high school teacher, run day nurseries. Clyde (1993) undertook research with female pre-service preschool teachers and found that male and female preschool teachers had different responses to classroom situations and therefore male preschool teachers preferred not to work with female teachers. Clyde's work showed that when males started working as preschool teachers, they needed more support from their colleagues. Also, since women comprise the majority of preschool teachers, their views may change some decisions and implementations of their male colleagues.

Male preschool teachers encounter various problems in the workplace related to the gender bias of preschool teaching, for instance, male preschool teachers were seen as potential sexual abusers (Barnard et al., 2000; Cohen, 1992; Cushman, 2005; Drudy, 2008; Farguhar, 1997; Santiago, 1989; Shaham, 1991; Thornton, 1999; Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003), labeled homosexuals or not real men (Farguhar, 1997; Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003) since this type of teaching was women's work (Drudy, 2008; Kelvin, 1986). Moreover, low status (Cohen, 1992; Cushman, 2005; Drudy, 2008) and low wages (Barnard et al., 2000; Cohen, 1992; Cooney and Bittner, 2001; Cushman, 2005; Drudy, 2008; Farguhar, 1997; Kelvin, 1986; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009; Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003) also affected male preschool teachers.

Since it is considered that the number of male preschool teachers should be increased because it would create different role models for young children and would decrease gender stereotypes in society (Drudy, 2008; Farguhar, 1997; Thornton, 1999). However, in order to counter the negative attitudes and encourage more men to become preschool teachers they need the support of society, other preschool teachers, administrators and their classmates during their training (Anliak & Beyazkürk-Şahin, 2008). In particular, support from female colleagues is crucial thus it is important that an analysis is undertaken concerning the attitudes of women preschool teachers and determine how their views can impact on the male preschool teacher in the school.

The research questions for this investigation;

- a. What are the views of female pre-service preschool teachers about men being preschool teachers?
- b. What factors do female preschool teachers consider affect male teachers' choice of occupation?
- c. What can be done to increase society's acceptance of male teachers in preschool education?

The findings of this study may be beneficial for male preschool teachers, especially when they start their career. Moreover, female pre-service preschool teachers may consider the findings in relation to their attitudes to and views about their male colleagues.

## 2. Method

The purpose of this study was to investigate the views of 24 female pre-service teachers in the department of Early Childhood Education in a state university in Turkey. They had undertaken two-semester' teaching experience and encountered preschool teachers with different educational perspectives and backgrounds. Also, there was one male preschool teacher candidate in the undergraduate student cohort but he did not participate in this study.

The data was collected through semi-structured interviews designed by the researchers. In order to develop the interview schedule, the researchers' teaching experience, and a relevant literature review related to male preschool pre-service and in-service teachers, and female preschool pre-service and in-service teachers' views about their male colleagues were utilized. The final interview schedule contained 14 open-ended questions. The content and face validity of the semi-structured interview schedule was conducted by two experts from the departments of Child

Development and Education, and Educational Sciences. Then, two pilot interviews were carried out to provide structure validity, some items were adjusted and the question order was rearranged to increase the clarity for the participants. The final interview schedule consisted of 10 questions; three regarding demographic items with the remaining seven open-ended questions aiming to investigate the views of female preschool pre-service teachers regarding male preschool teachers.

The researchers explained the aim of the study to the pre-service preschool teachers and asked if they wished to participate in the study those who agreed signed a volunteer participation form. In order to obtain the full information and reduce the time taken to manually record the interviews it was planned to audio record all the interviews (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). All the participants agreed to being recorded. The duration of interviews varied from 20 to 30 minutes.

For the data analysis, transcripts from the tape recordings of interviews were prepared which, two researchers coded separately. This is the process of naming the meaningful parts of the data then examining, comparing, conceptualizing data and making connections between data (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2005). The determined codes were listed then the researchers discussed the codes and combined those that were related. After all the thematic codes were examined, the following main themes of the data were determined as:

- a. the presence of male preschool teachers in the profession
- b. the factors affecting male teachers' choice of occupation
- c. ways of decreasing society's bias concerning male preschool teachers

Lastly, from the interviews certain quotes were taken in order to support the findings which according to Cresswell (2007) enrich the description of the themes.

### 3. Findings

#### 3.1. Presence of male preschool teachers in the profession

When asked their views about whether male teachers should work in preschool, most of the female preschool pre-service teachers (n=21) agreed that there should be male preschool teachers however a few (n=3) disagreed. The female teachers gave the following three main reasons for the presence of male teachers in preschool: implementation (n=12), professionalism (n=10) and support for the development of the children's social/emotional skills (n=8). In relation to male preschool teachers' implementations, many of female pre-service teachers (n=7) emphasized that their male colleagues undertook innovations in teaching, in the activities and problem solving methods. Other comments were that men were better than women at dealing with discipline problems (n=2), encouraging creativity (n=1) and organizing physical activities (n=1). Moreover, the female teachers considered the male teachers to be less aggressive than the female teachers (n=1) and were able to provide more logical solutions for different situations (n=1). However, teacher did not clarify the particular situations. Lastly, one preservice teacher said that she felt that male teachers were more democratic, fair and kind in the classroom.

In terms of professionalism, several of the female teachers stated that their male colleagues were more professional (n=5) and objective (n=5). They explained this could arise from men being less sensitive than women and having less maternal instincts. According to one female preservice teacher;

*"The professionalism of male preschool teachers may be based on children's perceptions because children generally think female teachers as mother and they need their teachers' care and love during absence of their mothers."*

Moreover, female pre-service teachers (n=2) commented that the male teachers' interests and skills were more important than their gender. Lastly, one teacher said that there should be male preschool teachers in preschools since they can contribute to the female teachers' professional development and implementations.

The female preschool pre-service teachers stated that male teachers supported the development of the children's social and emotional skills. For instance, the men offered a different a role-model (n=3) and could prevent the

children from becoming biased against male teachers (n=2). It was also considered that male teachers are better communicators (n=2) and one of the female pre-service teachers said that boys in particular preferred playing with their male teachers.

Three of the pre-service teachers stated that they did not approve of male preschool teachers gave differing reasons. One stated that male preschool teachers did not actively choose to work in preschool. Another felt that since preschool teachers should sometimes be a caregiver and that males are not appropriate for this role. A third teacher explained from a personal perspective;

*“If I were a parent, whether I would want a male preschool teacher would depend on my child’s gender. If I had a daughter, I would never accept a male preschool teacher.”*

### 3.2. Factors affecting male teachers’ choice of occupation

When asked their views about the reasons why men choose to be preschool female preschool pre-service teachers gave different answers. Many of the teachers (n=9) thought the employment opportunities in preschool teaching was the main factor. They explained that since in Turkey the importance of early childhood education was on the increase, there are many vacant positions for teachers, administrators, academician, and researchers. Thus, career progression was considered to be important for men, as in the words of one teacher;

*“The general aim of male preschool teachers is to be an administrator in a preschool or to open their own school. I mean men need social status and this is really easy to achieve in the preschool sector.”*

According to two pre-service teachers, male teachers choose to work in a preschool as a path to other work such as research assistant, academician, counselor, or administrator. Moreover, since early childhood education is a new area in Turkey, there are many topics for research which one of the teachers stressed it as a factor affecting the male teacher’s choice. Another teacher commented that male preschool teachers changing to another profession supported society’s bias that preschool teaching was a woman job.

In terms of male teachers’ not preferring preschool teaching many of the preschool teachers (n=10) emphasized bias and pressure of society. Some teachers specifically stressed that preschool teaching was the same as care giving (n=1), and that women were better caregivers (n=1) and physical contact between the male teacher and the students could be misunderstood (n=1).

### 3.3. Ways of decreasing society’s bias concerning male preschool teachers

When asked their views about ways of reducing the bias in society about male preschool teachers, the female pre-service teachers focused; informing society and conducting more research related to male preschool teachers in the world. They said that society in general and parents in particular should be informed via advertisements (n=2) and programs on television (n=1) and the role of male teachers in the preschool classroom. Counseling services should explain the roles and responsibilities of preschool teachers to high school students (n=1). Lastly, some of the pre-service teachers said that there should be more research on various topics related to preschool education and male teachers (n=2).

## 4. Conclusions and recommendations

According to findings of this study, the female preschool pre-service teachers stated that male teachers should be involved in preschool teaching because of their implementation, professionalism and support for the development of the children’s social/emotional skills. In relation to male preschool teachers’ implementations, this research is in agreement with the findings of Anliak and Beyazkürk-Şahin (2008). They emphasized that the most crucial factor was that being a good teacher was more important rather than being a male teacher. It is also necessary to decrease the society’s bias related to gender of teachers. Moreover, Cooney and Bittner (2001) stated that some young

children need male teachers to be successful. It can be interpreted as successful implementations and attitudes of male preschool teachers.

Teaching is generally accepted as a feminized profession (Drudy, 2008). Since parents have some expectations from preschool teachers such as caring, women are especially suited to this job (Cameron & Moss, 1998). However, female preservice teachers in this study stated that after males started to teach in preschools, teachers in these institutions began to be accepted as educators. This idea is consistent with Sumsion's (2000a) study that males provided an alternative model for preschool teachers.

In relation to male preschool teachers supporting children's social/emotional skills development, according to Drudy there is a common view that males should be preschool teachers as role models but there are a few experimental studies about this issue (2008). The Turkish female pre-service teachers in this study are in agreement with this issue however; their positive views may result from observing successful male preschool teacher candidates in their classrooms.

On the other hand, one of the female teachers commented that male teachers did not actively choose to be preschool teachers and this idea is in keeping with the finding of Beyazkürk (2006) which reported that male preschool pre-service teachers in Turkey had chosen this area because of their low score in the university entrance exam. Furthermore, this approach to the profession may raise concerns for this type of male preschool teacher because preschool teaching requires more than just teaching skills (Inan, Bayındır, Doğan-Temur & Bartan, 2010).

The female teachers in the study commented that those men that did choose preschool teaching were motivated by the number of available jobs, the opportunities to change their career path and pursue various research areas. However, according to studies, there are some differences between reasons of male preschool teachers' career choice in Turkey and other countries. For instance, in a study carried out in the USA, Robinson (1977) reported that in spite of traditional factors such as money, prestige and power, it was the love of children and the content of the education program and curriculum that were the reasons why men choose preschool teaching. Similarly, Rentzou and Ziganitidou (2009) stated that the love of children was the main reason that Greek male teachers decided to work in preschools.

In Turkish culture, caring and being together with young children is still considered to be women's work, thus this will affect the number of men that would consciously choose to be a preschool teacher in Turkey. Inan, Bayındır, Doğan-Temur and Bartan (2010) emphasized that the majority of Turkish society are not familiar with the idea of male preschool teachers thus in this environment male preschool pre-service teachers may not feel comfortable. There is also the view that male preschool teachers could be potential sexual abusers (Barnard et al., 2000; Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003) homosexuals or not real men (Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003). Although these reasons are consistent with other male preschool teachers' in other countries, low status (Cushman, 2005; Drudy, 2008) and low wages (Cushman, 2005; Drudy, 2008; Rentzou & Ziganitidou, 2009) are not the reasons why Turkish male teachers do not choose to work in preschool. In fact this may be due to that fact that preschool teachers' wages are not particularly low in Turkey.

Various authors support the idea that the population of male preschool teachers should be increased in order for there to be both male and female role models and this can bring about changes to the gender stereotype held by young children (Drudy, 2008; Farguhar, 1997; Rentzou & Ziganitidou 2009; Riley, Holmes, Conwell & Blume, 1985; Rodrigues, 1997; Thornton, 1999). Female preschool pre-service teachers in this study emphasized some suggestions to prevent society's bias and increase the number of males such as informing society via advertisements and TV, and conducting more research about male preschool teachers and Farguhar (1997) and Barnard et al. (2000) reported that the media could be used to change social views about the appropriateness of men as teachers of young children. Other studies offer various suggestions such as providing male teachers with opportunity of working with same-gender colleagues (Barnard et al., 2000; Cooney & Bittner, 2001; Nelson & Shikwambi, 2010; Rentzou & Ziganitidou 2009) and thus gaining more experience (Barnard et al., 2000; Beyazkürk, 2006; Farguhar, 1997; Inan, Bayındır, Doğan-Temur & Bartan, 2010; Wiest, Olive & Obenchain, 2003) thus they could be better accepted by the children, teachers and principals, and would develop positive attitudes towards their school and therefore increase their self-esteem as a preschool teacher. In order to increase the numbers and retention of male teachers in



Turkish preschools the universities and Ministry of National Education should provide the necessary support and create the opportunity for positive teaching experience.

To conclude, most of the female preschool pre-service teachers participating in the study accepted the idea of male colleagues because they felt they would make a positive contribution to the children's education, the professional development of female colleagues and to early childhood education in general. In order to increase the numbers, and retention, of male teachers in Turkish preschools, the education departments of universities and the Ministry of National Education should provide the necessary support and create the opportunity for positive teaching experiences for male preschool teachers in Turkey. Furthermore, an active media campaign should be undertaken to make the general public aware of the benefits of male preschool teachers. In addition, it would be useful to carry out further studies on a larger number of female preschool teachers who have had more experience working with male colleagues.

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